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Democracy and Good Governance Program: More Representative, Participatory and Accountable Governance

What are Nepal's key issues in the democracy and governance sector?

The expectations of Nepali citizens rose following the democratic movement of 1990, and the restoration of multi-party parliamentary democracy. Over a decade later, however, democracy's promise to improve daily life remains unrealized. Weak democratic institutions and high levels of public sector corruption, combined with the breakdown of electoral and political processes in late 2002, have created a crisis of democracy and governance. The principal actors necessary for a robust democratic society – civil society organizations, political parties, citizens, free press – have failed to assume constructive roles in advocating on behalf of public interests, strengthening mechanisms for accountability, and combating cronyism. Social and economic exclusion of low castes, under-represented ethnic groups and women, combined with a lack of basic services provision in education, healthcare, and rural infrastructure, continue to confound democratic governance and development aspirations. Nepal's future now hinges on the ability of its people to strengthen key democratic institutions and implement reforms.

- Disadvantaged castes account for only 3.1% and under-represented ethnic groups only 6.2% of individuals reaching the graduate level of education, even though they comprise about 60% percent of the population.
- Women comprised only 8% of the seats in the last elected House of Representatives, which was dismissed by the King in October 2002, and less than 7% of Nepal's civil service.
- High-caste Brahmin/Chhetris and Newars retain over 80% of civil service and other influential governance-related positions, even though they represent only 38% of the population.
- From 1994 to 2001, the caseload in the Supreme Court increased 180% (from 18,279 to 30,407 cases), while funding and resources remained constant at real values.
- 57% of respondents to a 2002 opinion poll lacked confidence in receiving 'justice' from the court.
- From 1990 to 2000 just 73 corruption cases were decided in courts, whereas in 2003 alone the courts decided 55 cases, with the Government of Nepal's Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) earning an 85% conviction rate (47 of the 55 cases filed).
- At least 60% of the more than 5,700 detainees and convicts in Nepali prisons are estimated to have no legal defense counsel.

What does USAID do to support Nepal to strengthen democracy and governance?

Since Nepal's transition to democracy in the early 1990s, USAID has provided assistance to develop a new constitution, improve parliamentary decision making, increase the political participation of women, improve the election process and educate voters. More recent programs focus on the rule of law and respect for human rights, public sector corruption, government accountability to all sectors and strata of Nepali society, and political and electoral reform for a more representative and responsive democracy. For 2003-2006, USAID plans to invest \$6 million in a rule-of-law program with two major aims:

Strengthened Rule of Law and Respect for Human Rights: This concentrates on improving the administration of justice in courts, and in prosecutor and public defense organizations. Activities include: organizational capacity building and administration system enhancement for courts and prosecutor offices to better serve citizens; increased access to justice for the poor and disenfranchised through technical assistance, training and logistical support to the judiciary to create a new state-funded national public defense system, and increase links with existing civil society, legal assistance services; improved advocacy and legal frameworks for rule-of-law through grants and technical support for stronger policy analysis and partnerships between civil society organizations and government entities implementing justice sector reforms.

More Transparent, Accountable and Effective Governance: This program focuses on strengthening the integrity of government planning and implementation, and improving anti-corruption systems and legal frameworks for good governance reform. Activities include: technical assistance, training, and support to the CIAA to plan, implement and monitor government compliance with the United Nations Convention Against Corruption and other regional accords; support for select non-partisan non-governmental organizations that contribute to the national anti-corruption agenda; institutional and procedural strengthening, training and modest logistical support for selected anti-corruption organizations, such as CIAA, prosecutors, special tribunals/anti-corruption courts, Public Accounts Commission; technical assistance for assessing legal reform requirements to strengthen anti-corruption initiatives; and grants to support non-partisan anti-corruption civil society initiatives, and good governance/anti-corruption coalition building.

What are the results?

- Increased awareness among the major political parties on the need for electoral and political reform.
- Strengthened election and political reform processes, through training, forums, radio campaigns, and the dissemination of reading material on voter education for the Election Commission and 30 district offices.
- Participation of political party and civil society representatives at anti-corruption, party-integrity and accountability conferences.
- Support for the official Nepal delegation to attend and sign the UN Convention against Corruption.
- Publication of an assessment of the Nepal electoral system, to identify needs and opportunities for major reforms in electoral and political processes – including, design of future activities for National Elections Commission institutional strengthening and elections planning.
- Over 7,000 community women from ten districts of southern Nepal have received training in effective campaigning and leadership skills, with another 3,000 slotted for training in 2004.

Who are the key partners?

USAID is part of a larger community of donors involved in democracy and governance, including the United Nations, British Development Agency, Danish Development Agency, and the German Development Agency. They collaborate with select public sector organizations, including the Judiciary, the CIAA, the Ministry of Law and Justice, the National Elections Commission, and other State organizations. International and local non-governmental citizen groups also implement these programs.

For more information:

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